Where Gather Those Who Bear
"The Burden of the Desert of the Sea"

INDIA HOUSE

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SEYMOUR DURST

FORT NEW AMSTERDAM (NEW YORK), 1651.

When you leave, please leave this book
Because it has been said
"Ever'thing comes t' him who waits
Except a loaned book."

Where Gather Those Who Bear "The Burden of the Desert of the Sea"

INDIA HOUSE

A description prepared from historical material collected by H. W. Foster of the New York Title and Mortgage Company.

The mystery of the sea, that calls to men; the ships, whose masts stood forest-like at the docks, bearing in their holds the wealth of The Indies and carrying memories of many trips to the "sprinkled isles that o'erlace the sea"; the romance, the adventure and the profit of the Seven Seas are concentrated within the walls of India House.

Well named, because "The Indies" stands for overseas commerce. Well located, on a spot where traditions of early New York commerce center. Appropriately decorated with rare pictures of brave old ships, paintings from China, models of once mighty boats, all carefully gathered and affectionately preserved. Such is India House.

From the very first of Dutch New York history, the section which is now called Hanover Square figured in the maritime annals of the thrifty colony. From the earliest times, the little square India House dominates, has been a center of influence in the town's affairs. The reason is not far to seek.

It is found in its location near the docks, where since the earliest days ships have anchored, where they still come in and whence they still go forth, carrying the treasures of this and other lands.

Hanover Square was, originally, nearly at the water's edge, with a slip running out into the river. In Dutch Colonial days it was in sight of the home of Governor Kieff and we learn that in 1648, this official, wearied of entertaining business guests at his home, built the city's first hotel, later on used as the Stadt Huys or City Hall.*

The appearance of the city in these early days of Hanover Square has been described by a contemporary writer, Madam Knight, who said, "The buildings are brick, generally, in some cases of divers colors and laid in cheques, being glazed, they looked very well." Writing of the appearance of the interiors, she exclaims, "They were neat to admiration." She describes the fire places as of tile and extending out into the room. The streets were paved to the width of ten feet from the fronts of the houses, leaving the center unpaved as a runway for water. There were no sidewalks.**

The first house on the site was built in 1660 by Abraham Martens Clock, a miller and carpenter. It was a substantial dwelling, with ground for a vegetable garden and a barn. The property had a well on it to which the neighbors came for its

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* "New York City" by Rider. Page 129.

** "History of the City of New York" by David T. Valentine. Page 214.

excellent water. In front of the site now occupied by India House ran Burger Jorrison's path from his house to the water-front.

Nicholas Bayard bought the property in 1673. He tore down the old house and built a more pretentious residence in 1686.

Captain Kidd was a frequent visitor at this home. He lived at what is now 56 Wall Street, in a dwelling that he bought from Governor Dongan when the wall on Wall Street was torn down.

Freebooters and pirates on the high seas were a constant source of anxiety and loss to the merchants who lived in Hanover Square. The pirates were, in effect, the hi-jackers of their day. They robbed the slave traders. A boat would go out to get negroes—the pirate would follow it into the remote places where negroes were to be had and there capture the money with which it was intended to buy slaves. This practice became so great a pest that the mercantile interests appealed to the English Ministry to assist them in fitting out a cruising vessel to act against the marauders. Colonel Robert Livingston of New York brought the matter before the English Governor and introduced Captain Kidd to command such a vessel. The undertaking was finally started on a private basis, profits being divided by the owners of the vessels with a liberal share to Captain Kidd.

Inconography of Manhattan, by J. H. Phelps Stokes, Vol. 2. Pages 323, 405.

New Amsterdam and Its People, by J. H. Innes. Page 222.

A commission was issued on December 11, 1695, "To the Trusty and Well Beloved Captain William B. Kidd."

The popular impression has been that Captain Kidd turned pirate himself and amassed great treasure as a result of his operations and the fact that he was tried in England for piracy, convicted and hanged gave some authority for this impression. However, recent examinations of trustworthy records are cited to show that such was not the case; that he was an honest, capable sea captain and that his trial and execution were due to the necessity of appeasing the Grand Mogul who threatened to banish British from India unless reparation was made for French ships legitimately taken by Kidd under the then existing relations between the two countries, but which contained cargoes shipped by Indian merchants. The matter was discussed in the House of Commons, which threatened to proceed against the owners of Kidd's vessel; but, when it developed that these owners were prominent men high in the King's favor, the Commons hesitated to proceed. As something had to be done, Captain Kidd was made the scapegoat and lost both life and reputation that others might go free.

New York Title and Mortgage Company is fortunate in the possession of an abstract of India House property, which goes back to the earliest English days of New York—in other words, to the persons who held the property by grant for, the King after the British, for the second time, definitely assumed control of New York.

The first owner of record is a man of that family whose name is still a force in New York, Samuel Bayard, and an early glimpse we get of it in the records shows that he lived there with his father, Nicholas Bayard. It was a fighting family.*

Nicholas Bayard came to New York when a youth and in 1665 was appointed Clerk of the Court of Mayor and Alderman. At that time there was great feud between Jacob Leisler and Governor Dongan. Mr. Bayard was a member of the Governor's Council and conspicuous in his opposition to Leisler and those who opposed the Governor. He was banished, but returned secretly to get some papers. His presence was made known and Hanover Square was full of men with torches to capture him. He made his escape, however, but was afterward captured and imprisoned for a year. Later on, at the overthrow of Leisler, Bayard was re-instated and succeeded in bringing Leisler to the scaffold.

Ten years later, in 1702, when the Leislerian party was again in power, Bayard was tried and condemned to death. A change in politics released him from imprisonment and his condemnation was annulled.

He died in 1711. The property went to his son, Samuel Bayard, from whom the chain of title in India House begins.

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* "History of the City of New York," David T. Valentine. Page 229.

Hanover Square, from the early days of its history, was an important place of business. Even in 1754 it was an urban center. William Walton, the rich man of his day, gave up his house in Hanover Square to move "well out of town," to Quenn Street, which is now about Franklin Square.

In the early Revolutionary days, Hanover Square was the smart shopping center of the town.*

It is very probable that the building now standing at 1 Hanover Square is really the first structure that was built on this property as a whole. There were small houses there during the Dutch and Colonial period but whatever stood on this spot was, undoubtedly, burned in the great fire of 1835, when a conflagration originating at Hanover and Pearl Streets and destroying six hundred buildings, occasioned a loss of $15,000,000 in the heart of what was then New York's business district.

The fire was supposed to have started from the explosion of a gas pipe and a Mr. Watson, visiting from Philadelphia, wrote to his home town—"This disaster certainly is a warning against foreign invention and embellishment." From his Philadelphia point of view, New York was certainly too advanced and dangerously venturesome.

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* "History of the City of New York," James Grant Wilson. Vol. 1, page 366; vol. 2, page 305; vol. 2, page 523.

He spoke strongly against buildings which had reached the great height of four or five stories, "producing nothing but ugly deformity in the perspective, with no adequate counter-balancing advantages.*

While the tax records of New York City do not go back to this date, other records showing transfers of the real estate involved, without describing the buildings thereon, indicate that the present home of India House was built by one Richard Carman in a general reconstruction which followed the big fire in 1837.

The Carman family figured frequently in the records of Long Island. They were prominent, influential people in early New York history. Their names appeared in the City Directories between 1835 and 1837—the only Richard was Richard A. Carman of 42 Broadway. It is probable that the family built the structure for stores and rented them, as no family named Carman then lived in Hanover Square, according to the City Directories.

It was certainly standing exactly as we now see it in 1851, as the Hanover Bank which occupied the property at that time has a picture of the edifice which shows that it has remained almost unchanged since that date.

The Hanover Bank acquired the property in 1851 and occupied half of it for banking purposes.

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* "Inconography of Manhattan Island," by J. H. Phelps-Stokes. Vol. 3, page 525.

The other part was used by the firm of Robert L. Maitland & Company, tobacco importers.

Hanover Square was named in honor of King George of Hanover, and the Hanover Bank, when it was first organized, planned to call itself the Hanover Square Bank, but later changed its name to The Hanover Bank.

After the Hanover Bank moved out, the property came into possession of Robert L. Maitland. He was a solid, conservative figure in New York's affairs of two generations ago. The property was subsequently used by the New York Cotton Exchange, 1870 to 1885, and later by W. R. Grace & Co.

India House, as an organization, came into being in 1914, when a group of business men headed by James A. Farrell and Willard Straight, decided to found a meeting place in the interests of foreign trade. The building at 1 Hanover Square was then vacant, W. R. Grace & Co. having recently left the site to move into larger quarters elsewhere on Hanover Square.

India House rented the building from George Ehret, the then owner, extensive alterations were made and the rooms were fitted out in the spirit of the early American overseas trade. Mr. Straight donated the Chinese art objects, Mr. James A. Farrell, the President, gave, then and later, rare ship models, engravings and pictures. The American Asiatic Institute, a collection of pictures of Asiatic countries and of leaders of American commerce, and Mrs. Straight

donated a collection of thirty-five ship models and subsequently a large collection of paintings, prints, maritime relics and other decorations which had been loaned to the Club when organized and had given it much of its unique atmosphere. These and other gifts from members and friends have given the Club a very fine collection of pictures, models and other articles connected with sailing vessels and seafaring life.

Early in 1918 the late Willard Straight bought the property with the idea that India House might some day wish to own it. Through the generosity of Mrs. Straight, now Mrs. Leonard K. Elmhirst, India House acquired the property at a very reasonable figure in February, 1921, and on the expiration of certain leases in 1924, rearranged and rebuilt the interior, creating, through the brilliant work of Mr. W. A. Delano, the well known architect, what is now known as the Marine Room, the charm and beauty of which make it one of the most attractive features of India House.

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